

SWITCHING MODE VOLTAGE REGULATOR AND METHOD THEREOF

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FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates generally to a switching
mode voltage regulator, and more particularly, to an efficiency
10 improvement of a switching mode voltage regulator and method
thereof.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

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Fig. 1 shows a schematic diagram of a conventional
synchronous switching mode voltage regulator 10, which
comprises an output stage 12 connected between an input voltage
 V_{in} and ground GND to generate an output voltage V_{out} , and a
20 pulse width modulator (PWM) 14 responsive to the output voltage
 V_{out} to generate a PWM signal P_1 by which the output stage 12 is
driven. The output stage 12 includes a high-side switch 122
connected between the input voltage V_{in} and a phase node 124,
and a low-side switch 126 connected between the phase node 124
25 and ground GND. The pulse width modulator 14 has an error

amplifier 142 to generate an error signal S_{EA} by comparing the output voltage V_{out} with a reference voltage V_{REF} , and a PWM comparator 144 connected with the error signal S_{EA} and a ramp signal S_{RAMP} to generate a PWM signal P_1 , by which the high-side switch 122 and low-side switch 126 are turned on/off. When the output voltage V_{out} is decreased, the ON duty of the PWM signal P_1 is increased so as to increase the ON time of the high-side switch 122, and thereby raising the output voltage V_{out} to the desired value. The circuit 10 has advantages of high efficiency and rapid response at high and moderate loadings. However, the efficiency of the circuit 10 may be decreased due to the power consumption caused by the fact that the inductor current I_L flowing toward the low-side switch 126 as a result of the decreased frequency and the reduced ON duty at light loading, for example at idle mode.

Efficiency is important for the PWM regulator, particularly for portable apparatus applications. However, the efficiency of a typical switching mode regulator may be decreased as its loading is reduced, this is due to the fact that a constant amount of the power is wasted in the switching drive circuit thereof, being independent of the magnitude of the loading thereon. For the improvement of the efficiency, a switching mode voltage regulator disclosed by U.S. Pat. No. 6,307,356 issued to Dwelley employs a fixed minimum non-zero duty cycle generator to generate a signal at the idle mode with an ON duty wider than that

of the PWM signal for switching the high-side switch, so as to avoid the current flowing toward the low-side switch from the inductor and thereby without the reduction in the efficiency of the regulator circuit. However, according to the second law of voltage balance

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$$\Delta I_L = (V_{in} - V_{out}) \times T_{ON} / L = V_{out} \times T_{OFF} / L,$$

where ΔI_L is the variation of the inductor current I_L , T_{ON} is the ON time of the high-side switch, T_{OFF} is the OFF time of the high-side switch, and L is the inductance of the inductor. The variation ΔI_L of the inductor current I_L will be decreased if the difference $(V_{in} - V_{out})$ is decreased while the ON time T_{ON} remains unchanged. Furthermore, the OFF time T_{OFF} will be decreased with the almost unchanged output voltage V_{out} , and then the number of the switching in the switching circuit will be increased, thereby causing the increased switching loss, and the decreased efficiency will be effected. Such a problem also occurs in an asynchronous switching mode voltage regulator.

20 Therefore, it is desired improved efficiency for a switching mode voltage regulator and method thereof.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

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It is an object of the present invention to propose an asynchronous switching mode voltage regulator and method thereof for improved efficiency at light loading.

5 It is another object of the present invention to propose a synchronous switching mode voltage regulator and method thereof for improved efficiency at light loading.

 According to the present invention, an asynchronous
10 switching mode voltage regulator comprises an output stage connected between an input voltage and ground to generate an output voltage, a pulse width modulator responsive to the output voltage to generate a PWM signal, and an adjustable one-shot circuit to generate an adjustable signal based on an adjustable
15 voltage and the PWM signal at light loading. The output stage includes a switch connected between the input voltage and a phase node, and a unidirectional current-conducting device connected between the phase node and ground, and the switch is switched by the adjustable signal at light loading. The adjustable signal has a
20 wider ON duty than that of the PWM signal, such that the number of switching the switch is decreased and as a result, the switching loss is reduced, thereby improving the efficiency of the voltage regulator.

25 In a synchronous switching mode voltage regulator,

according to the present invention, an output stage connected between an input voltage and ground to generate an output voltage includes a high-side switch connected between the input voltage and a phase node, and a low-side switch connected between the phase node and ground, a pulse width modulator generates a PWM signal in response to the output voltage to modulate the high-side and low-side switches, a phase detector detects the voltage on the phase node to generate a detection signal at light loading to block the low-side switch and to control an adjustable one-shot circuit that generates an adjustable signal to switch the high-side switch based on the PWM signal as well as an adjustable voltage, and an OFF duty detector detects the adjustable signal to reset the phase detector. Again, the adjustable signal has a wider ON duty than that of the PWM signal, such that the number of switching the switches of the output stage is decreased and as a result, the switching loss is reduced, thereby improving the efficiency of the voltage regulator.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

These and other objects, features and advantages of the present invention will become apparent to those skilled in the art upon consideration of the following description of the preferred embodiments of the present invention taken in conjunction with

the accompanying drawings, in which:

Fig. 1 shows a schematic diagram of a conventional synchronous switching mode voltage regulator;

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Fig. 2 shows a schematic diagram of an asynchronous switching mode voltage regulator according to the present invention;

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Fig. 3 shows one embodiment for the adjustable one-shot circuit shown in Fig. 2;

Fig. 4 shows a timing diagram of various signals of the voltage regulator shown in Fig. 2 at light loading;

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Fig. 5 shows a schematic diagram of a synchronous switching mode voltage regulator according to the present invention;

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Fig. 6 shows one embodiment for the next clock generator shown in Fig. 5; and

Fig. 7 shows a timing diagram of various signals of the voltage regulator shown in Fig. 5 when its loading varies.

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DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Fig. 2 shows an asynchronous switching mode voltage regulator 20 according to the present invention, which comprises an output stage 22 connected between an input voltage V_{in} and ground GND to generate an output voltage V_{out} . The output stage 22 includes a switch 222 connected between the input voltage V_{in} and a phase node 223, a diode 224 connected between the phase node 223 and ground GND, an inductor 226 connected between the phase node 223 and the output terminal V_{out} , and a capacitor 228 connected between the output terminal V_{out} and ground GND. A pulse width modulator 24 responsive to the output voltage V_{out} generates a PWM signal P_1 to switch the switch 222 of the output stage 22 so as to modulate the output voltage V_{out} . The pulse width modulator 24 includes an error amplifier 242 having a negative input connected with the output voltage V_{out} as well as a non-negative input connected with a reference voltage V_{REF} so as to generate an error signal S_{EA} , and a PWM comparator 244 having a non-negative input connected with the error signal S_{EA} as well as a negative input connected with a ramp signal S_{RAMP} so as to generate the PWM signal P_1 . An adjustable one-shot circuit 26 is connected with the input voltage V_{in} , an adjustable voltage V_{adj} , and the PWM signal P_1 , so as to generate an adjustable signal S_{adj} that is ORed with the PWM signal P_1 by an OR gate 28 to generate

a control signal S_1 for a driver 29 to generate a driving signal to switch the switch 222 of the output stage 22. Preferably, the adjustable voltage V_{adj} for the adjustable one-shot circuit 26 is derived from the output voltage V_{out} .

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As shown in Fig. 3, the adjustable one-shot circuit 26 shown in Fig. 2 includes a charger 262 having a capacitor 2622 connected with a switch 2624 in parallel, a D-type flip-flop 264 having an input D connected with a supply voltage VDD, another input C connected with the PWM signal P_1 , a reset input R, and an output Q connected to the charger 262 with an inverter 266, a charging current generator 267 providing a charging current I_3 to the charger 262, and a comparator 268 having a non-negative input connected with the reference voltage V_{REF} , a negative input connected with the charger output V_{CH} , and an output connected to the reset input R of the flip-flop 264 with an inverter 269. The charging current generator 267 includes a current source 2672 connected to the input voltage V_{in} to generate a current I_1 in proportional to the input voltage V_{in} , a current mirror 2674 having a reference branch 2676 connected with the current I_1 and a mirror branch 2678 to mirror the current I_1 , and a current sink 2679 connected with the adjustable voltage V_{adj} and the mirror branch 2678. The charging current I_3 is determined by the current sink 2679 that separates a current I_2 from the mirrored current I_1 , and the sink current I_2 is preferably proportional to the

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adjustable voltage V_{adj} . The current sink 2679 may be realized by conventional current divider or the like.

Referring to Figs. 2-4, the timing diagram shown in Fig. 4 illustrates various signals of the regulator circuit 20 shown in Fig. 2 at light loading, in which waveform 30 shows the clock at which the regulator 20 operates, waveform 32 shows the error signal S_{EA} , waveform 34 shows the ramp signal S_{RAMP} , waveform 36 shows the PWM signal P_1 , waveform 38 shows the adjustable signal S_{adj} , waveform 40 shows the output voltage V_{out} , and waveform 42 shows the current I_L flowing through the inductor. As the regulator 20 enters into a light loading, only a small part of the error signal S_{EA} overlaps to the ramp signal S_{RAMP} , as shown by the waveforms 32 and 34, which causes the PWM signal P_1 thus generated to have an extremely narrow width, as shown by the waveform 36. The state table of the D-type flip-flop 264 shown in Fig. 3 is listed in Table 1:

Table 1

R	C	Q
1	X	0
0	0	0
0	1	0
0	1→0	0
0	0→1	D

From Table 1, it is shown that, on receiving the PWM signal P_1 , the D-type flip-flop 264 of the adjustable one-shot circuit 26 is triggered to generate its output D only when its input C is transferred from "0" to "1". In other words, only at the pulse rising edge of the PWM signal P_1 , the D-type flip-flop 264 is triggered to generate a high-level voltage for example VDD at its output Q. The switch 2624 of the charger 262 is opened by the high-level voltage of the output Q after it is inverted by the inverter 266, such that the charging current I_3 starts to charge the capacitor 2622 of the charger 262 so as to generate a charger output voltage V_{CH} . Once the charger output voltage V_{CH} reaching the reference voltage V_{REF} , the comparator 268 will output a signal which, further inverted by the inverter 269, will reset the D-type flip-flop 264, resulting in the adjustable signal S_{adj} at the output Q of the D-type flip-flop 264, as illustrated by the waveform 38 in Fig. 4, and simultaneously the switch 2624 will be closed to cause the capacitor 2622 discharged since the output Q of the D-type flip-flop 264 is reset and is no longer at the high-level voltage. Then, as shown in Fig. 2, the PWM signal P_1 and adjustable signal S_{adj} are ORed by the OR gate 28 to generate the control signal S_1 for the driver 29, by which the driving signal is generated instead to switch the high-side switch 222 so as to modulate the output voltage V_{out} , as shown by the waveform 40 in Fig. 4. The pulse width of the adjustable signal S_{adj} is determined by the charging time of the capacitor 2622. If it is desired to have an increased

charging time, the charging current I_3 should be reduced, and if it is intended to have a reduced charging current I_3 , only increasing the voltage V_{adj} is needed, due to the fact that $I_3 = I_1 - I_2$ and I_2 is proportional to the adjustable voltage V_{adj} . On the contrary, the
5 desired decreased charging time is obtained by the increased charging current I_3 caused by decreasing the voltage V_{adj} .

According to the second law of voltage balance

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$$\Delta I_L = (V_{in} - V_{out}) \times T_{ON} / L = V_{out} \times T_{OFF} / L,$$

as the voltage difference $(V_{in} - V_{out})$ decreases, the adjustable voltage V_{adj} may be increased to further increase the ON time T_{ON} of the regulator 20, due to the non-constant ON time T_{ON} controlled by
15 the adjustable voltage V_{adj} , such that both the variation ΔI_L of the inductor current I_L and thus the OFF time T_{OFF} remain unchanged. Therefore, the number of switching the high-side switch 222 will be decreased and as a result, the switching loss is reduced to result in the regulator with much higher efficiency.

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A synchronous switching mode voltage regulator 50 according to the present invention is shown in Fig. 5, which comprises an output stage 52 connected between an input voltage V_{in} and ground GND to generate an output voltage V_{out} , and the
25 output stage 52 includes a high-side switch 522 connected

between the input voltage V_{in} and a phase node 523, and a low-side switch 524 connected between the phase node 523 and ground GND. A pulse width modulator 54 generates a PWM signal P_1 in response to the output voltage V_{out} , and an adjustable one-shot circuit 56 generates an adjustable signal S_{adj} based on the PWM signal P_1 , input voltage V_{in} , and an adjustable voltage V_{adj} . The adjustable voltage V_{adj} is further ORed with the PWM signal P_1 by an OR gate 58 to generate a control signal S_1 for a high-side driver 60 to generate a driving signal S_U to switch the high-side switch 522. A phase detector 62 detects the voltage on the phase node 523 and receives the driving signal S_U through an inverter 64, so as to generate a detection signal S_D , an AND gate 66 receives the detection signal S_D and PWM signal P_1 through inverters 68 and 70, respectively, to generate a control signal S_2 , a low-side driver 72 generates a driving signal S_L from the control signal S_2 to switch the low-side switch 524, and an OFF duty detector 74 detects the control signal S_1 to generate a reset signal S_R to the phase detector 62 to reset the detection signal S_D . For simplicity, the adjustable one-shot circuit 56 hereof is identical to the one 26 of the regulator 20, as shown in Fig. 3.

In Fig. 5, the pulse width modulator 54 is identical to a conventional one and comprises an error amplifier 542 and a PWM comparator 544. The negative input of the error amplifier 542 is connected with the output voltage V_{out} and the non-negative input

is connected with a reference voltage V_{REF} , such that an error signal S_{EA} is generated and connected to the non-negative input of the comparator 544 to be compared with a ramp signal S_{RAMP} on the negative input of the comparator 544 so as to generate the
5 PWM signal P_1 .

As shown in Fig. 5, the phase detector 62 includes a comparator 622, an AND gate 624, and a D-type flip-flop 626. The non-negative input and negative input of the comparator 622
10 are connected to the phase node 523 and ground GND, respectively, to compare the voltages thereon so as to generate a comparison signal S_C . One input of the AND gate 624 is connected with the comparison signal S_C , and the other input is connected with the driving signal S_U through an inverter 64, such that a signal S_3 is
15 generated for the input C of the D-type flip-flop 626. The inputs D and R of the D-type flip-flop 626 are connected with a supply voltage VDD and the reset signal S_R , respectively, and the detection signal S_D will be generated at the output Q. In addition, the OFF duty detector 74 includes a next clock generator 742 by
20 which the control signal S_1 is delayed to be a next clock signal S_N , and an AND gate 744 connected with the control signal S_1 and delayed signal S_N to generate the reset signal S_R .

As shown in Fig. 6, the next clock generator 742 of the
25 circuit 50 shown in Fig. 5 includes two D-type flip-flops 7422 and

7424 connected in series, an AND gate 7426, and an inverter 7428. The input D of the D-type flip-flop 7422 is connected with a supply voltage VDD, the input C is connected with the control signal S_1 , and the output Q is connected to one input D of the D-type
5 flip-flop 7424 whose another input C is connected with a clock CLK and whose output Q generates the next clock signal S_N . On the other hand, the clock CLK is connected to one input of the AND gate 7426 after inverted by the inverter 7428, the other input of the AND gate 7426 is connected with the next clock signal S_N ,
10 and its output is connected to the reset inputs R of the D-type flip-flops 7422 and 7424. The clock CLK is delayed by this circuit 742 to generate the next clock signal S_N .

Fig. 7 shows a timing diagram of various signals of the
15 regulator 50, in which waveform 80 shows the clock CLK, waveform 82 shows the ramp signal S_{RAMP} , waveform 84 shows the error signal S_{EA} , waveform 86 shows the PWM signal P_1 , waveform 88 shows the adjustable signal S_{adj} , waveform 90 shows the voltage on the phase node 523, waveform 92 shows the detection signal S_D ,
20 waveform 94 shows the next clock signal S_N , waveform 96 shows the driving signal S_U , waveform 98 shows the reset signal S_R , waveform 100 shows the output voltage V_{out} , and waveform 102 shows the inductor current I_L . In addition, the period from time t_1 to t_2 represents the duration the regulator 50 enters into a light
25 loading. Referring to Figs. 5 and 7, as the regulator 50 at heavy

loading, the waveforms 88, 92 and 98 are all "0", which means that the adjustable one-shot circuit 56, the phase detector 62, and the OFF duty detector 74 are all inoperative and during that time period, the regulator 50 is operated by the pulse width modulator 54 responsive to the output voltage V_{out} to generate the PWM signal P_1 to switch the high-side and low-side switches 522 and 524, as in a conventional regulator. When the regulator 50 enters into a light loading, however, as specified by t_1 in Fig. 7, the PWM signal P_1 from the pulse width modulator 54 will become extremely narrow and have a reduced frequency, as illustrated by the waveform 86. At that time, the regulator 50 is under the OFF duty, the voltage detected by the phase detector 62 on the phase node 523 is larger than 0, as illustrated by the waveform 90, and the driving signal S_U is 0, as illustrated by the waveform 96. The AND gate 624 in the phase detector 62 receives the comparison signal S_c and the driving signal S_U inverted by the inverter 64, and generates the signal S_3 to the D-type flip-flop 626 to thereby generate the detection signal S_D , by which the adjustable one-shot circuit 56 is triggered and further the low-side switch 524 is blocked via the inverter 68, AND gate 66, and driver 72, so as to prevent the current from flowing from the phase node 523 to ground GND through the low-side switch 524 and thus resulting in power loss and efficiency reduction. The PWM signal P_1 , input voltage V_{in} , and adjustable voltage V_{adj} are used by the triggered adjustable one-shot circuit 56 to generate the adjustable signal

S_{adj} , as illustrated by the waveform 88. This signal S_{adj} will be subsequently processed by the OR gate 58 to generate the control signal S_1 , upon which the driving signal S_U will be generated by the driver 60 to turn on the high-side switch 522, such that the output voltage V_{out} starts to be raised, as illustrated by the waveform 100. The control signal S_1 is detected by the OFF duty detector 74, the next clock generator 742 thereof will delay the control signal S_1 to generate the next clock signal S_N , as illustrated by the waveform 94. The AND gate 744 in the OFF duty detector 74 may determine the end point of the light loading operation of the regulator 50 according to the next clock signal S_N and control signal S_1 . As illustrated by the waveform 98, the next clock signal S_N and control signal S_1 are both at high level at the time t_2 and consequently, the reset signal S_R will be generated from the AND gate 744 to reset the phase detector 62 to end the light loading operation of the regulator 50. As illustrated by the waveform 96, during the light loading operation of the regulator 50, the output voltage 100 will be raised due to the charging of the inductor current 102 within the ON duty. Furthermore, this ON duty is larger than that of the PWM signal 86, and the width of the former is controlled by the magnitude of the adjustable signal S_{adj} or adjustable voltage V_{adj} and therefore, the number of switching the high-side switch 522 may be decreased, thereby reducing the switching loss and resulting in the efficiency improvement.

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As shown by the embodiment asynchronous and synchronous switching mode voltage regulator circuits 20 and 50, the numbers of switching the switches of the output stages 22 and 52 at light loading of the regulator 20 and 50 are decreased and
5 therefore each switching loss of them is reduced, i.e., the efficiency of them is improved.

While the present invention has been described in conjunction with preferred embodiments thereof, it is evident that
10 many alternatives, modifications and variations will be apparent to those skilled in the art. Accordingly, it is intended to embrace all such alternatives, modifications and variations that fall within the spirit and scope thereof as set forth in the appended claims.